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AN ESSAY

UPON

I *Corinth.* Chap. i. Vers. 21.

Against the

Infidelity of the Age;

And wherein is especially consider'd

The Wisdom of GOD, as to the
Time of *Christianity*, its being
published to the World.

by Mr Henry Bud's ay



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ASSISTANT

UNION

1. General. Chap. I. Vol. 21

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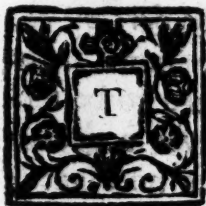
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UNION



AN ESSAY upon 1 Cor. i. 21.

For after that, in the Wisdom of God, the World by Wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the Foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.



HERE is perhaps at this Day nothing reckoned more contemptible, than the preaching of the Cross of Christ, by a Multitude among us who pretend to polite Learning, to be wise above their Fellows, and talk as if *Wisdom were to die with them*: And yet in all their Objections against Christianity, in all their Sarcasms against its Doctrines, they give no higher Evidence of their Wisdom, or Learning, than these in *Corinth*, and other Parts of *Greece* did, whom the Apostle *Paul* does here confound in all their Pretences, by posing them with, or rather by appealing to the World for an Answer to this Question. What the better is the World? Or is it ever likely to be by all that these Persons have done, or proposed to do, by all their specious Pretences to Wis-

dom? *Where is the wise Man? Where is the Scribe? Where is the Disputer of this World?*

By the *wise Men*, we are to understand the *Philosophers*, who arrogated Wisdom to themselves. By the *Scribe* may be well understood the *Jewish Doctor*, or *Rabbi*, whose Business it was to explain the Law. By the *Disputer of this World*, or, the *deep Searcher*, or *Inquirer of this Age*, as the Words (a) may be read, we may understand such, whether among the *Jew* or *Gentile Philosophers*, who enquired into the Nature of Things, into the Nature, State, and Condition of Mankind, and proposed Methods of their own, or refined upon the Schemes of others, so as to teach the World how they might be happy.

Now when the Apostle asks the Question, *Where is the wise Man? Where is the Scribe? &c.* the Import is not that there were none to be found who bore that Name, or affected to be reckoned worthy of it. There were never a greater Number of such in the World, and in no Place of it did they more abound than at *Corinth*, and the other Cities of *Greece*: Learning was at this Time at its Height there, Philosophers of all Sects abounded, and People travelled thither from all Nations for their Education, so that it became a proverbial Way of speaking to have been at *Athens*, or *Corinth*; to import a Man's having studied the more polite Part of (b) Learning.

Never did the *Scribes*, or *Doctors* of the Law, abound more than at this Time. The two famous

(a) συζητητὸς τῷ διαφωτισμένῳ.

(b) *Non cuiusvis homini contingit adire Corinthum.*

mous Schools of *Hillel* and *Shammai* at *Jerusalem* did train up, and send forth through all Places where the *Jews* were scattered, Multitudes of their Disciples, to propagate their several Doctrines and Expositions of the Law; by whom Religion, as it was laid in the Bible, was intirely laid aside, and their *Expositions* and *Traditions*, whereby they made void the Law of God, as our Saviour does justly charge them, were all that they taught their Followers, as the only Method to attain Happiness, and the Favour of God.

At no former Period then, was there ever a greater Number pretending to Wisdom, and setting up to teach others wherein true Happiness lay, and the Way to attain it.

But saith the Apostle, *Where is the wise Man? Where is the Scribe? Where is the Disputer of this Age?* What have they done by all their Learning? What hath the World been advantag'd by their Schemes? Is the World either the better, or wiser to Salvation? *Yea*, says he, *hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of this World?* Hath he not in the Conduct of Providence given a plain Demonstration, that the World by all that they have done, or by all they should be able this Way to do, is neither the better nor the wiser, with Respect to that wherein true Happiness doth consist?

And therefore it was every Way agreeable to Divine Wisdom, it was every Way suited to God's great Design, to stain the Pride of all Glory, that when these Men, by all their Learning and Wisdom, by all their different Schemes proposed, had failed of the main End, *namely*, of reforming the World: It was then worthy of God, and like himself,

himself, mercifully to step in, and give to the World, both of Jew and Gentile, a Revelation, and clear Discovery of the only Method whereby they could be made happy, whereby the World might be reformed, and poor fallen Man instated in the Divine Favour, and made happy in him, in whom alone their Happiness can ly, and in Conformity to whom does consist the Felicity and Dignity of the human Nature: And therefore adds the Apostle in the Words which we propose to illustrate, For after that, in the Wisdom of God, the World by their Wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the Foolishness of Preaching, to save them that believe.

Among all the Objections made against Christianity in this degenerate Age, there is none perhaps more frequently made Use of, nor wherein the professed Enemies of Christianity would seem more to glory and triumph than in this. What, say they, is this probable? Is it becoming, or agreeable to the Notions we must frame of the Divine Goodness, if this be the only Way to Happiness, that God should have left Men so long in the dark, and only at the End of four thousand Years to have given a Revelation or Discovery of it to the World?

I need not inform my Readers in how many of our late (c) Writings against Divine Revelation, this Objection is thrown up, and insisted upon with all the Rhetorick and Eloquence they are Masters of.

And

(c) See particularly Tindal's Christianity as old as the Creation. Chap. 14.

And yet, if I am not mistaken, there is nothing in this Objection in which they so much seem to glory, but what they have borrowed from these Philosophers and Scribes, who first opposed Christianity when it began to be published to the World; and therefore we may be allowed to tell these Gentlemen, that for all their Pretences to profound Learning, and accurate Reasoning, they have here done nothing but borrowed their Weapons from others, and furbished them up the best Way they were able, thinking now, in the End of the World, to make a better Figure with them, than the wise Men and Disputers of that Age, who first made Use of them.

I do reckon that the Words of the Apostle do contain a solid and satisfying Answer to that Objection, as it was framed of old by the wise Men, and Philosophers of that Age; and does equally enervate all the Force that is in these Harrangues, that of late have been made against Christianity its appearing no sooner in the World.

And that I may illustrate this Argument, I propose the following Method to open up the Answer itself, as it lies in the several Branches of this Text.

1^{mo}, I incline to explain that Branch or Proposition in the Words, *That the World by Wisdom knew not God.*

2^{do}, That what the World did reckon the *Foolishness of Preaching*, was a Mean worthy of God's appointing, and every Way fitted to answer the great End proposed, namely, the Salvation of Mankind.

3^{tio}, That it was every Way worthy of God, and wherein Divine Wisdom doth shine, that when

when *the World by all their Wisdom knew not God*, then by the *Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe*.

4^{to}, I may deduce a Corrollary or two from the whole.

1^{mo}, The first Thing proposed is to shew, *That the World by all their Wisdom knew not God*. By which Phrase we are not to understand, that they had *no* Knowledge or Idea of a living and true God, or that they did not own and acknowledge that there was a supreme Being, who formed this World, and gave Life and Breath to the Variety of Creatures with which it is stored; and that therefore he was the Object of their Worship, Praises, Prayers, Homage and Adoration. The Evidence of the *Being of God*, was too glaring in the Works of *Creation and Providence*, from all Things *without* them, and what they felt *within* them; for these *wise Men* to be altogether ignorant of this, *Rom. i. 21. The invisible Things of God, &c.* But the plain Meaning from the Apostle's Discourse in this Context is, That by all their Wisdom they attained not that Knowledge of the true and living God, of their Dependence on him, as could direct them to the Enjoyment of him as their chief Portion and Happiness; or how they might be reconciled to him, so as to be again admitted into his Favour, and have the Corruption and Depravity of their Nature cured, without which they could not be made happy, or in case to enjoy God, to rest, and delight in him as their alone compleat Happiness and Salvation.

This is *that Knowledge of God* which they were destitute of, and so in all their Searches after Wisdom, they did but wander in the Mazes of

of their own blinded Understanding, and *professing themselves to be wise, became Fools*, never attaining to the true End of Wisdom, either wherein true Happiness did consist, or the Means how to obtain it.

Thus *the World by their Wisdom knew not God*: By *the World* some incline only to understand the *Gentiles*, who were destitute of external Revelation, while other Interpreters considering that the *Scribe* is in the Context joined with the *wise Men*, or Philosophers, do incline to understand the learned *Rabbi* or Doctors of the Law among the *Jews*, as well as Philosophers among the *Gentiles*.

Here it must be acknowledged, that the *Jews* had vastly the Advantage of the Heathens, in as much as they had Revelation among them; for to them were *committed the Oracles of God*, Rom. iii. 1, &c. It must be owned, that to them *per-tained the Adoption and the Glory, the Covenants, the giving of the Law, the Service of God, and the Promises*, &c. Rom. ix. 4, 5. So that when the Lord made known his Statutes and Judgments to *Jacob*, he dealt not so with every Nation, Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20.

These sacred Oracles containing a Revelation of God's gracious Purpose and Design of saving poor Sinners thro' the Mediation of a great *High-priest*, who was to come and make Attonement for Transgression, thro' a great Sacrifice and Propitiation; and the whole of their Worship being *emblematical*, and *typical* of it: Had these *Jews* taken heed to these Things thus revealed, and made known among them in a Suitableness to that Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace, which they lived under: The Knowledge of the true
B God,

God, and the only Way of Salvation thro this Redeemer, might have flourished among them (d).

Yet so it is in Fact, that at that Time when the Saviour came into the World, and when Christianity began to be preached and published to Mankind, the *Jewish* Church was miserably corrupted; and their learned Men and *Rabbi's* among them, who pretended to teach others the Law and Knowledge of God, were themselves ignorant of it, and had lost the true spiritual Meaning and Intent of their Religion, and transformed the same into a meer external Form, and had by *their Traditions made void the Law of God*, as our Saviour does charge them, *Matth. xv. 3, 6. Mark vii. 13.* And in the great and important Matters of Salvation he warns the Multitudes *to let them alone, as blind Guides of the Blind, who must both fall into the Ditch*, *Math. xv. 14. and xxiii. 16.* *John ix. 41.* And the Apostle *Paul* does charge against them the same Blindness and Ignorance of the Knowledge of God, and the Way of Salvation through him, *Rom. ix. 31, &c. Rom. x. 3.* For *being ignorant of the Righteousness of God, and going about to establish a Righteousness of their own, they submitted not to the Righteousness of God.*

Not to mention the Divisions and Sects among them, and the prevailing Party of the *Sadduces*, who may, without great Breach of Charity, be ranked

(d) See this explained and illustrated to excellent Purpose, in a late Essay published by an ingenious Gentleman, Intituled, *Some Thoughts concerning Religion natural and revealed, &c.*

ranked with Deists, as denying the Immortality of the Soul and the Resurrection, yet these were in chief Power, as is evident from the *Acts of the Apostles* : 'Tis plain that the *Pharisees*, who were look'd upon as the better and more religious Part of the *Jews*, and who were at this Time distinguished as Followers severally of the two famous Schools of *Shammai* and *Hillel*, had equally and entirely gone off from the Meaning and Spirituality of their Law and Worship, were ignorant of the *Righteousness of God*, and the the Way of Salvation to poor lost Sinners; and while *they sought after the Law of Righteousness*, yet *they attained not to it* ; and therefore, notwithstanding all their Wisdom and high Pretensions, may justly fall under the Charge here in the Text, *That by their Wisdom they knew not God*.

But when we look into the *Gentile World*, it was at this Time wholly overspread with Darkness and Ignorance ; and at no former Period was Irreligion and Atheism so prevalent as at this particular Time.

It is very true, that God had in his *wise Providence* raised up among them some very great Men, who assumed to themselves *Wisdom*, and were reckoned by others *wise Men and Philosophers*, and these had laid out themselves by their Lessons of *moral Philosophy* to rectify Mankind, whom they own'd to be miserably corrupt, and lamented in very affecting Strains of Eloquence, the miserable depraved State of human Nature.

Severals of these, besides their own Searches into natural Wisdom, had the Advantage of *lighting their Torches*, as it is by some expressed, at the Light of Divine Revelation. They had Oc-

casion in their Travels to converse with the *Jews*, (e) and had the Advantage of the Law of *Moses*, and other Parts of holy Write, being translated into the *Greek* Language near 300 Years before the coming of our Saviour (f) in the Flesh. After which Time, it is most certain, that these great Men did talk otherwise, both concerning God and his Perfections, as well as the Precepts of Morality, than any of them did before they had that Advantage. *Plato* and *Socrates* do deliver themselves in such a Manner, as is evident they were beholden to the Revelation among the *Jews*, tho' they did not own so much; and, as is likewise plain, they did not comprehend its Meaning.

Yet

(e) *Pythagoras*, as all Accounts bear, travelled into *Egypt* at the Time that the *Jews* and *Jeremiah* were there, and from thence went to *Babylon*, where *Daniel* and others were; and it cannot be imagined, that he who travelled to know the Learning and different Religions of the World, would overlook the *Jewish*, while he had so good an Opportunity of informing himself.

(f) Tho' I give little Credit to the fabulous Accounts of the 70 Interpreters imployed by *Ptolemy* King of *Egypt* to translate the Bible: Yet it is certain that as the *Jews* returning from *Babylon*, where they lost their own Language, and learned the *Caldean*, were very soon obliged to have the sacred Books translated into the *Caldean* Tongue for their Service at Home, and in their publick Worship, just so the same Necessity obliged the *Jews* at *Alexandria*, and other Parts of *Egypt*, where they were in great Numbers, to have the Old Testament Books translated into *Greek*, being the Language which they then spoke and understood, as it was at that Time spread far through the World, and the Language which was most studied and spoke by all learned Men.

Yet after all, where is the wise Man? Where is the Disputer of this Age? What was the World advantaged by them? Was the World grown better? Was Human Nature reformed? Were People more religious? Yea on the contrary they were grown worse than before.

The two famous Schools of Philosophy, namely the *Ionick* founded by *Thales* the *Milesian*, and the *Italick* founded by *Pythagoras*, and the great Men that succeeded these, such as *Socrates*, *Plato*, and others, were able to do as little this Way as those who went before them.

The *Stoick* Philosophers, who pretended to be a little more refin'd in their Notions of *Happiness*, and Precepts of Morality than those who went before them, yet all their Philosophy was look'd on in the World but as an airy Speculation, and no Way suited to the Nature and Condition of Mankind.

And what did all this at Length end in? Why, *Epicurus*, who had refin'd upon the Principles of *Anaximander*, who seems first to have founded the *Atomical* Philosophy, and laid the Foundation for Atheists to build on; *Epicurus*, we say, with his Disciples, who were very numerous, had indeed abundantly ridiculed the Vanity of the Heathen Gods, the Folly and Impiety of that Worship that was offer'd up to them: But what was Mankind the better of his Philosophy, while he left the World in a Manner Atheists, without any Religion at all. Yea, we may say, without a God for the World to worship, unless such an one whom he had pent up in the Heavens, and who had no Concern for the Affairs of this lower World.

Lucretius had, in an elegant Latin Poem, set off this Philosophy to the best Advantage, whereby the whole of the *Roman* Empire was debauched; and it is owned by such as have searched most into the History of that Time, That never was the World so filled with Atheism, never was Mankind so ignorant of, and unconcerned about any Thing that looked like Religion.

Justly then may we, here with the Apostle, conclude, *That the World by all their Wisdom knew not God.*

II. We come next to illustrate the *second Proposition*, namely, *That what the World did reckon the Foolishness of Preaching, was a Mean worthy of God, and every way fitted to answer the great End designed, that is the Salvation of a lost World.*

This Method, the Result of infinite Wisdom, is here in the Text called *the Foolishness of Preaching*, not because it was *Foolishness* in its self, or what its *Preachers* had Reason to be ashamed of, *Rom. i. 16. Seeing it was the Power of God to Salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentiles.* But the Apostle here gives us to understand what it was that the World, whether of *Jew or Gentile*, did then reckon it to be. They did look upon the preaching of the Gospel to be Foolishness, and that both in respect of its Subject Matter, and the Manner of its being preached or published to the World.

First, In Respect of the Subject Matter of it, namely the preaching of a *crucified Christ*. This the Apostle tells us in the Context, was to the *Jews a Stumbling-Block*, and to the *Greeks Foolishness*. The *Jews* stumbled at the Doctrine of a crucified Christ, because it did not tally with their Notions

ons of Pomp and worldly Grandeur, in which they expected their *Messias* or Saviour should appear. It was on the other Hand reckoned the most foolish Thing in the Eyes of the wise Philosophers, that they should expect Salvation from one who never made a Figure in the World, who was ignominiously treated at *Jerusalem*, and crucified by his own Countreymen.

Thus, without looking into the Cause itself, or giving a fair and impartial Hearing to Christianity, or what its Preachers had to say in its Defence, it was condemned as Foolishness, without inquiring further into it.

Secondly, It was reckoned Foolishness by the World, in respect of the Manner of its Doctrines being preached. Christ did not chuse the *Wise*, the *Learned*, and the *Great* Men of this World, who by their Authority and Influence, their Learning and Eloquence, might spread his Doctrine, and gain Profelytes to it. But he chose out at first twelve plain illiterate Men, and of mean Station in the World, and these he made his Witnesses, these he constitute his *Apostles* and *Ambassadors* to go into all the World, and preach Salvation thro' him to a lost World.

This indeed is what *Human* Wisdom could never have contrived, but would have chosen a Method the very Reverse of this, and made Use of the learned and great Men of the World, as the fittest Instruments to propagate its Doctrine, and gain Submission to its Precepts. Thus the Philosophers did complain that their Philosophy had so little Effect in the World, because they wanted sufficient Authority to inforce the same.

The

The Wisdom of this World would have reckoned Learning and Authority the more probable Method of establishing a Religion, and gaining the World's submitting to it. But had Christianity been propagate in this Manner, it would thereby have been destitute of *one great Evidence* of its being *divine*.

For however the World did reckon this to be *Foolishness*, yet when a few poor Men, without the *Learning* of the Age, without *Eloquence*, without *Authority*, are sent to preach this Gospel, and bid the *Jews* lay aside their Expectations of a Messias coming in Splendor, and all the temporal Advantages they expected from him, and submit to be the Disciples of a crucified Jesus; to bid the *Gentiles* renounce their *Gods*, their stately Temples and sumptuous Worship, and yield Obedience to Christ and take on his Cross, to receive these Doctrines, and fall in with these Commands that are directly contrary to their beloved Lusts and Pleasures; to command these wise Men to lay aside the Conceit of themselves and their Wisdom, to lay down their Pride and Vanity, and sit as Scholars at the Feet of Jesus, preaching this Doctrine; that we must *deny ourselves* and *follow him*, expect no temporal Advantage from our Profession, but that on the contrary, *through manifold Persecutions and Tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; that we must fix our Hope on these Things that are invisible, beyond Time and the Grave, and that here we must lay our Accounts with Reproach and Persecution for his Sake.

When such a Doctrine, preached by such Men as the Apostles were, yet made the Wisdom and Learning

Learning of the World fall before it : When *this Doctrine, thus preached*, did conquer all Opposition, let these Men, who *deny Miracles*, and talk so much about the *Nature of Things*, explain to us how such Doctrine, and preached in what they do reckon a foolish Manner, could ever prevail in the World, unless a Divine Power had accompanied the Preaching of the same.

Now, that which these Men, and Disputers of that Age, did reckon the Foolishness of Preaching, was a Mean worthy of God, and fitted to answer the great End proposed, namely, the Recovery of Mankind from their Sin and Misery, by healing their Natures, and inflating them in Favour with God.

It is acknowledged by all, That true Wisdom does consist in proposing the greatest and noblest End, and in pursuing it by Means most proper to attain it.

The greatest Enemies of Christianity among us cannot deny but that it is an *End* worthy of God, and suitable to his infinite, glorious, and amiable Perfections to take Pity upon a World of rational Creatures drenched in Sin and Misery, whose Nature is so depraved that they are incapable of relishing true Happiness, incapable of acting suitable to the Dignity of their Nature, incapable of being made happy untill their Nature be renewed : Who, untill they be *made partakers of the Divine Nature*, their Souls framed and changed into a holy, heavenly, and God-like Temper and Disposition of Mind, all the Fulness of God, all the Glory of the higher House, is not capable of making them happy.

This is acknowledged to be the State of Mankind, even by those who impugn the Necessity of Divine Revelation; They own the Corruption and Depravity of our Nature, while they pretend not to be able well to account for the Way or Means, how we fell into such a melancholy deplorable Condition.

Now what can be more worthy of God, than to pity his own Creatures, rational Creatures indued with an immortal Soul, not to perish when it leaves this Body, but to have an eternal Duration; and yet so sunk in Sin, and corrupted in all the Powers and Faculties of the Soul, as is incapable in that Condition to be happy, or act in any Regard worthy of its Original.

If then it be Wisdom to propose the highest and noblest End, nothing can savour more of infinite Wisdom, than this, which is the great Scope and Design of Christianity, of Christ's coming into the World, and the Doctrine which from Heaven he did reveal, namely, to pity Mankind in their present State, again to render them capable of answering the great End of their Creation, to shew forth the Glory of him who gave them a Being, to set before them the Remedy from Sin and all its fatal Consequences.

Thus our great God and Saviour did manifest himself merciful and compassionate to his Creatures: Yea amazing is the Instance of his Love and Pity this Way, which the Gospel doth reveal, that the *Son of God* should become the *Son of Man*, that we, the Sons and Daughters of Men, who had fallen from our Integrity, and cast ourselves out of the Divine Favour, should be relieved out of our Misery, and being made the *Children*
of

of our heavenly Father, justified in his Presence, and sanctified by his Grace, should again be made happy in Likeness and Conformity of our Natures to God himself.

Sure then, this which is the great Scope of Christianity, this which is the great End of Christ's coming into the World, must be acknowledged by all to be every Way worthy of God, and which must lay all the Redeemed under the strongest Tyes and sweetest Obligations, to proclaim his Grace and Mercy here, and all his Perfections thro' the whole Length of their eternal Duration; *Eph. i. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, &c.*

Now, as Divine Wisdom is evidently manifest in this so noble and generous Design, far beyond whatever was proposed by these Philosophers, in all the Attempts they made to be useful in the World; so the *Means* of bringing about this End, even these which the preaching of the Gospel does reveal, are no less worthy of God, and wherein his manifold Wisdom doth, and will eternally shine.

These Gentlemen (g) who impugn Divine Revelation and its Necessity, have display'd all their Eloquence in representing the *Supreme Being* to us, as good and beneficent, merciful and kind, loving and compassionate, and therefore most ready to pardon and forgive his Creatures, the Work of his own Hands, upon their Repentance and acknowledging their Sin.

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(g) Such as Lord Herbert who lived in the last Age, in his Book intituled, *The Oracles of Reason*; and Tindal in this Age, in his Book, *Christianity as old as the Creation*:

The Light of Reason, say they, and the *Nature of Things*, does discover so much to us, without any Necessity of a Revelation, and that any other Method proposed, in what we Christians believe to be the *Word of God*, is derogatory to these Ideas of his lovely and amiable Perfections, by which all Mankind would frame their Notions of the *Supreme Being*, were it not, say they, that Superstition hath taught them otherways, and instilled in them Notions of God as if he were cruel, severe, and an *arbitrary Being*.

Pardon me for using the Expressions; it is the Language in which these Gentlemen chose to represent their own Sentiments, and ridicule those who oppose them.

And so, according to them, the Doctrine of *Christ's coming into the World to save Sinners*, to be a *Sacrifice* and *Propitiation* for Sin, is reckoned not only *Foolishness*, and unworthy of God, but likewise directly contrary to what right Reason would teach and instruct us.

And then as to *positive Precepts* and *Institutions* of Religion and Revelation, against these they inveigh bitterly as altogether *useless*, and that by them we represent the *Divine Being* as *Arbitrary*, who would command us Things meerly for the Sake of Commanding, and which have no real Connection or Influence upon our Happiness, or the Way to attain it.

In these two Points especially do they reckon the preaching of the Gospel to be Foolishness, and no Way in the *Nature of Things* suited to the End proposed, the Happiness of Mankind.

But would they allow Christianity a fair Hearing, it will appear even to the Conviction of
Reason

Reason itself, that the Gospel which they reckon the Foolishness of preaching, is every Way worthy of God, and wherein his Wisdom does shine forth.

1st, We will allow them to harangue as much as they please, upon these *Attributes* of the Mercy and Goodness of God, and all their Discourses on these Points have been far from exhausting the Subject; we cannot enough extol his Goodness, and his Perfections are infinite, not to be sufficiently extolled by the Tongue of Men and Angels: But we would ask these Gentlemen, if they will allow *Justice* and *Holiness* to be any Way essential to the *Divine Nature*.

If they will not, as indeed they speak very sparingly on that Head, then they frame to themselves an Idea very unworthy of that God who made the World, and rules in it, and governs his reasonable Creatures by a Law.

If they will grant so much, as of Necessity they must, then they must frame no Idea of the Divine Benignity, Mercy and Goodness, but what is at the same Time consistent with his Holiness, Justice, and other Perfections.

Now, we would fain know, if it be so very consistent with the Idea that we must frame of God, as the *just* and *supreme* Governor of the Universe, who is to rule and govern his Creatures by a Law, the eternal Rule of Righteousness, the Transcript of his own Holiness; that Sinners and Transgressors of his Law, yea who daily are repeating their Acts of Transgression and Rebellion against him, that such Persons can have good Ground to expect, that upon their *Repentance*, that is, as explained by these Gentlemen, upon the Persons acknowledging

knowledging that he is a Sinner, that God, the supreme and righteous Judge of all the Earth, is to pardon them, and tho' continuing in Sin, to restore them to his Favour.

We would ask them, if his *Holiness* and *Justice* do not oblige him to punish the Transgressor, to vindicate the Holiness and Honour of his Law, and how without this, the very End of Government can be secured? How otherways can we frame to ourselves any Idea of God and of his Government, consistent with that Idea of *Holiness* and *Justice*, which the very Light of Nature does proclaim to be an essential Perfection of his Nature? The Scripture Expressions to this purpose are verified in Matter of Fact, Ps. l. 21. *These Things thou hast done, and I kept Silence: Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself, &c.* Because the Lord did not immediately inflict Punishment upon the Transgressor, therefore they conclude that he is such as they are, that he is no more offended at Sin than they are, that he is as ready to forgive their Sin, as they are to forgive themselves; and if this be not to frustrate all Ends of Government, if this be not to embolden Sinners to go in Rebellion against God and his Laws, I appeal to all that will allow themselves the Exercise of Reason. The wise Man *Solomon's* Observation, and I hope our Deists will allow, at least, he was not inferior to themselves in Point of Wisdom; his Observation we say is, *Eccles. viii. 11. Because Sentence is not speedily execute against an evil Work; therefore the Hearts of the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do Evil.* If, according to the Idea these Gentlemen would have us to frame of God, that Sinners may go on in their perverse Ways, and

and indulge themselves in all that their corrupt Heart lusteth after, it is but at the End of their Days laying unto the righteous Judge of all the Earth, *I repent, I am sorry for my Deeds*, and thereupon they may be confident of his Favour: Can this consist with God's Holiness and Justice? Are these Maxims proper to secure the Ends of Government? Can such Principles as these have a suitable Influence to deter from transgressing his Laws, and keep the Children of Men in a holy Awe and Reverence of his Majesty.

Yea but, say they, his Holiness and Justice, and all the Ends of Government are abundantly secured while he pardoneth none but the *Penitent*.

But we would ask them, What is it they mean by *Repentance*? So far as their Discourses on this Head go, they seem to mean no more by it, save the Person's acknowledging before God, that he hath sinned, and that he is sorry for it, even while he is as prone as ever to be guilty of the like, or same Crime, when Temptation or Opportunity come in his Way.

If at any Time they go further in their Discourses concerning Repentance, the utmost they mean by it is, the Person's breaking off his former wicked and rebellious Course, and some *ouvert* Acts of Sin, while they speak nothing at all of the Change of Nature, or Habits and Principles of Holiness, opposite to these vicious corrupt Habits, the Source of our Rebellion. It is plain there is no more in their Repentance, than the Exchange of one Sin for another, or a Tract of gross outward Sins, for a Course of more secret
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and hidden Wickedness, and Enmity against God.

Now, seeing this is all the Notion they have of Repentance, how is it possible they, or any Person, can satisfy their own Conscience, in the Prospect of standing before the righteous *Judge of all the Earth*, and venture his eternal Salvation upon this sole Foundation, that God is merciful, and that he acknowledges he is a Sinner, and has transgressed his holy and righteous Laws.

But we would further ask these Gentlemen upon their own Principles, If it be To clear now from the Light of Nature, that upon Repentance we can be assured of Pardon from our Almighty Creator and Judge, how came it to pass, that till of late, the whole World, Learned and Ignorant, the wise Men, Philosophers, whole Kingdoms and Nations in the World, did believe the very contrary; and that it was needful to appease the offended Deity by some *Sacrifice* or *Satisfaction*?

It seems that it is only in these last Ages of the World, that the Light of Nature doth shine forth so clearly: For it is undeniable in Fact, and the History of all Ages do attest, that no such Thing was found out, or believed, by those who seem'd not to want some Knowledge of the *Supreme Being*, the Creator and Governor of the Universe, more than these Gentlemen who talk so much of the Light of Nature in our Day.

Now, let these Persons who exalt Nature so much, give us a Reason how, in the *Nature of the Thing*, all Nations appear so very early to have imbib'd the Opinion, yea were so persuaded of it, that they made it the Foundation of their
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Religion, that the Deity was to be appeased, or rendered propitious by Sacrifices, and that there was no Pardon without some Sort of Satisfaction. Let them give us an Answer to what is objected to them on that Head, and lately to good Purpose in the forementioned Essay, *Some Thoughts concerning natural and revealed Religion.*

We are confident to affirm, in Opposition to their Principles, That by Nature's Light, or any Idea we can form of God and his Perfections; no Man that is truly concerned about Eternity, and how he shall appear before God's Tribunal, can, or will rest satisfied in his own Mind, that upon his acknowledging his Transgression, God will pardon his Iniquity, and receive him into his Favour. And all that they have lately said upon this Subject, are nothing else but what they have borrow'd from Revelation, where they take up Principles revealed, but not in the Connection as they stand in the sacred Records; and as it hath been lately objected to them, that it is pretty arrogant in them to take up Principles from Revelation, and then palm them upon the World, as if they were the Dictates of Nature's Light; in order to destroy Revelation itself, from which they did borrow these Principles; and which, as by them used, are perverted to a quite contrary End.

But now Christianity, and the Doctrines of our holy Religion, is so far from derogating from these Perfections of God, which they insist so much upon, *wamely*, his Goodness and *beneficent Nature*, that Christianity does advance these Perfections infinitely higher, than it is possible to those who impugn Revelation to do; and at the same Time, does magnify and illustrate his Holiness, Justice,

and other Perfections which are not less essential to his Nature; which by the opposite Scheme of Principles are intirely overlook'd in this Matter. Our holy Religion does teach us, that God our Saviour is *merciful and gracious*; *Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. long suffering, and abundant in Goodness and Truth, &c. but yet will by no Means clear the Guilty.* Revelation does teach us, and Reason will not contradict it, that *the Righteous Judge of all the Earth will judge rightly.* But then it shews us his abundant Goodness, Mercy, and Love to poor Sinners, in that rather than they should perish, God gave his own Son, his belov'd Son, to be a Ransom and Satisfaction in their Room and Stead; and in this Way *Justice and Mercy do meet together, Righteousness and Peace do kiss each other.* Here is Justice satisfied, and yet Mercy shew'd to the Transgressors; here is Sin punished, and yet the Offender pardon'd; here the Law is magnified; and yet Mercy abounding to the Criminal; here is Death submitted to, and yet triumph'd over.

This is the great Subject-matter of the Christian Revelation; it is in this Way, to the Honour and Glory of all the Divine Perfections, that Grace, Mercy, and Salvation is through Christ crucified published and revealed to lost Sinners; *Rom. iii. 25, 26. There is Propitiation through his Blood revealed, that God might be just, and the Justifier of them that believe in Christ Jesus.*

This Gospel reveals to us, not only how the Sinner may be pardon'd consistently with Justice and Holiness; but likewise how our corrupt and depraved Nature may be healed, cleansed, and sanctified, and we again rais'd up by the Grace

and Influence of his Holy Spirit, to that Measure of Holiness, and Conformity of Nature to God himself, so as he may, in a Consistency with his Holiness, communicate himself to us his Creatures, and we made capable of delighting in God and his Holiness, and made happy in the Enjoyment of God, as our *alone Portion*.

Here we say is the Mercy, Goodness and beneficent Nature of God, infinitely more manifested than according to the Deists Scheme of Principles it possibly can be, and yet all this is to the magnifying his other Attributes, which are no less essential, and the Glory of the Divine Nature, *John iii. 16. God so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, &c. Rom. v. 7. Herein is manifested the Love of God, that while we were yet Sinners Christ died for us.*

This Subject might be pursued further, by telling these Persons, that that which they do except most against in the Scheme of the Christian Doctrine, namely, *That the Son of God should become Man, in order to be a Sacrifice and Propitiation to satisfy Divine Justice, &c.* by telling them we say, that however indeed Nature's Light could never have discovered thus much, yet now that it is plainly revealed, there is nothing in the Nature of the Thing; to speak in their own Dialect, that is here impossible, or implies a Contradiction: Nothing in this Doctrine, but what is every Way suited to infinite Wisdom; yea here it is, that this manifold Wisdom does appear. In this Way Divine Revelation gives us more clear, and infinitely more exalted Ideas of God, and all his Perfections, than it is possible for these Men to

conceive, according to the Principles which they maintain in Opposition thereto.

It were easy to press them upon this Head, and show how foolishly, and unworthily of God, they are forced to talk, in maintaining the Sufficiency of Nature's Light: How unworthily of God, and his Perfections they talk, in objecting against this Part of Revelation, how that they will allow God to do nothing, and to know no other Way, but what they, by their dark and blinded Understanding, are capable to fathom, and assign a Reason for.

Sure nothing can be more arrogant, than for poor mortal Creatures, removed but a few Degrees from nothing; and who knows so very little about himself, or how his Soul and Body are united together, and do mutually act upon, and affect one another; and yet for him to pretend, that God cannot do any Thing, but what we are able to account for, and give a Reason of, is such a Degree of Arrogance, that nothing but Pride, Ignorance, and desperate Enmity against God, can be at the Root of it: But this Subject is too large for me to launch further into it (b).

Thus, when we consider the Means by which Salvation is purchased, as they are revealed to us in the Gospel, however much they be reckoned Foolishness by a blinded World, yet appear every Way worthy of God, and, founded in Infinite Wisdom.

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(b) They who would see this Subject largely illustrated, may consult *Bates's Harmony*, &c. *Pollbill's speculum theologicum in Christo*, *Halyburton against Deism*, and our late Writers against the Infidelity of the Age.

Now, 2dly, Were we to consider at any Length the doctrinal Part of our holy Religion, and what are its Precepts revealed directing our Duty: Here the *Deists* must be at a Stand, and acknowledge that there never was in the World such Syſtem of *Morality* as is taught in the Gospel, and that all who ever before ſpoke upon this Subject, the greateſt and moſt accurate Philoſophers fall vaſtly ſhort of it. What are their Syſtems of *Morality* when compared with this? Nothing but incoherent, in moſt of them diſſering, and in other Caſes plainly ſinful.

But moreover Chriſtianity does carry its *Morality* to a greater Height than all the Philoſophers of the World ever pretended to, even to regulate the inward Thoughts, the Frame, Temper, and Diſpoſition of the Mind before God, as well as the outward Action before the World.

And finally it does recommend and inforce its Precepts by Motives and Arguments vaſtly ſuperior, and more engaging than any that ever were offered by the great and wiſe Men in the learned World.

But this our Adverſaries do not oppoſe; they own that the *Morality* of the Chriſtian Revelation is truly excellent and perfect; yea it is owing to it, that they are enabled to talk upon *Morality* in the Way and Manner that now they do, tho' they are not very frank in acknowledging that they are ſo much obliged to Revelation.

But the great Objection with them is againſt the *poſitive Precepts and Inſtitutions* of Revelation; this is what they reckon *Fooliſhneſs*; and here they diſplay their Wit and Rhetorick, or rather Raillery, as if it were not worthy of God, or agreeable

agreeable to the *Nature of Things*, for God to command his Creatures any Thing which they reckon hath not an immediate necessary Connection with, and Influence upon their Happiness and Felicity; and hence they ridicule all *positive Precepts* as unworthy to come from God, and say that we thereby represent God as an *arbitrary Being*; a Phrase they seem much to delight in, who commands merely for the Sake of Commanding, and then punishes his Creatures for their Disobedience.

Now the positive Precepts of Christianity being but few, namely, the two Sacraments of *Baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*, the one initiatory into the Profession of Christianity, and the other commemorative of the Death and Suffering of our Lord and Saviour, by which our Redemption was purchased: The more modest of our Adversaries allow, that if the other Doctrines of Christianity be sufficiently established, there is not much in these two Sacraments, but what might be allowed, without any Reflection on the Goodness of God, or his dealing with us not agreeable to the *Nature of Things*.

But it is the other positive Precepts laid down in the Bible, which they more fiercely attack, and by them endeavour to invalidate the whole of Divine Revelation.

A great Part of the *Ceremonial Law*, we acknowledge was of this Nature; it did consist of a great many positive Precepts and Institutions: But as they were Representations of great Blessings to be afterward more fully exhibited and revealed to the World, as they were suitable to that Dispensation the Jews did live under. They

were far from being *arbitrary* (i) in their Sense of the Word, or commanded by God merely for the Sake of Commanding.

These Precepts were either necessary to keep *Israel* from polluting themselves with the Abominations of the Heathen, and learning of them their Way;

Or were necessary continually to teach them that Holiness and Heart-purity, which God, who is infinitely holy, did require of them as his People, and a Nation holy, and peculiar unto him;

Or were instructive to them of the grand Point of Divine Revelation; namely, how Sin was to be expiated by the *Messias* who was to come, and the Attenuement to be by him made to Divine Justice.

To one or other of these Heads their ceremonial and positive Precepts may be reduced; and sure in all these there is nothing unworthy of God, nothing but what was some Way necessary for them in their present State and Situation; and so were not *arbitrary* Precepts, or Precepts given, which had no real good Tendency, or not suited to their Circumstances.

But we would fain ask these Gentlemen, who impugn so keenly positive Institutions, what Notions they have of Religion: And how Religion, which certainly must teach us our Duty and

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(i) See this Point distinctly treated by *Wissius* in his *Egyptiaca*, and accurately discoursed by the forementioned Author's *Some Thoughts concerning Religion*, Sec.

Behaviour toward God, can well consist without some positive Precepts and Institutions.

That we ought to acknowledge and honour God in all his Perfections, and accordingly ascribe to him the Glory that is due, is, what I hope, none of these Gentlemen will deny.

That the Happiness and Dignity of the human Nature does consist in Conformity to God, in resembling him in all his Perfections; and the more we are like him in these, the more we are happy, the more is our Nature exalted, is likewise what I suppose cannot, will not be denied.

It is in these that we hold Communion with God; it is in these that we can resemble him, and in doing so, it is thereby that we acknowledge and pay Homage to him, in these his Attributes which he manifests to us, and sets before us for our Imitation: Even his Holiness, Justice, Goodness, Mercy, Truth, &c. But now I would fain know of them, is not God likewise a Being that is Infinite, Omniscient, every where present, Eternal, that hath supreme Dominion and Authority over all his Creatures, and more especially hath Right to command and govern his rational Creatures, who are capable of Understanding, and giving Obedience to his Laws.

Now if there were no positive Precepts in Religion, I want to know what Way we could honour God, and pay Homage to these his Perfections, in which it is acknowledged that Man can bear no Resemblance unto God.

If I be obliged to yield Obedience to nothing, but what I see flows from the Nature of Things

Things; and what I am persuaded will have a necessary Tendency to, and natural Connection with my Happiness: If I do such Things, meerly because my Reason bids me do them. I would fain be instructed by these Gentlemen, how in that Case I can pay my Acknowledgements in a practical Manner to the *Authority* and *Sovereignty* of God, my Lord and Law-giver, seeing in that Case it is not the Authority of God commanding, but my *Reason*, that is the *formal Ground* of my Obedience.

I would gladly be informed; whether or not Obedience to the Commandment of God, *because* it is his Command, be not the most practical and greatest Evidence of my Regard to the Authority of God, and my acknowledging myself indebted to him for my Life, Breath and Being, who hath Right to command me, and rule over me? Do I pay an equal Respect to his Authority, when I do these Things only which I see and am persuaded have a necessary Connection with my own Advantage.

Such is the Notion which these Persons with all their Pretensions to accurate Reasoning would give us of Religion: That is, they would set me free from all Regard to the Authority of God, or his Right to command us by virtue of his Authority: Allowing us to pay no Regard to the Divine Command, but merely to consult our own Reason, and make that the supreme Standard of all our Actions, without allowing God to have Right to enjoin us any Thing, or to be wiser than we to know best what is for our Good, or what is most suitable for us to do.

I appeal to all the thinking Part of Mankind, if this be a Notion of Religion worthy either of God or Man, or if it be agreeable to the *Nature of Things*; that is, to the Dependence that we have upon God, and to the supreme Authority he justly challenges over us as the Works of his Hands.

But oh! say they, that which we complain of is, That you represent God as giving to Man, yea to *innocent Man*, a *positive Precept*, in a Thing merely indifferent, and which could no Way tend to his Happiness; and for his Failure, or not observing of that Precept, all Mankind are represented as ruined, destroyed, and cast out of God's Favour: This, say they, is the Case by us represented with *Adam* in that positive Precept given him, *Not to eat of the forbidden Fruit*: Sure, say they, there was no moral Good or Evil here; this Fruit could have done him no Harm, why then such a Command, as to restrain him from that which could do him no Prejudice, and for Disobedience to that Command, that he should be punished with the Loss of God's Favour, and subject to endless Misery?

On this Head they seem unmercifully to triumph. Is not this, say they, an *arbitrary Precept*? Is not this to command, or forbid, merely for the Sake of Authority? Is not this to give us an *Idea* of God as an *arbitrary Being*, who gives Commands to his reasonable Creatures, without any other Reason, than merely because it is his Will?

We should have wished these Gentlemen had been a little more sparing of hard Words and Insults, till, at least, they had brought us some evident

evident Reason from the *Nature of Things*, to shew that this Command, as it is stated in Divine Revelation, is not necessary in itself, and unbecoming God who gave it. And we would ask them a Question or two on this Head, for the vindicating the Honour and Credit of sacred History.

Did not God, the Author of our Being, show himself a good and beneficent God and Creator to Man, when he bespoke him out of nothing, made him such an excellent Creature, indued him with a reasonable and immortal Soul, capable of resembling God himself, in Likeness and Conformity to whom lies the Happiness and Glory of our Nature?

Was not the Goodness of God likewise very conspicuous, in that he not only formed to Man a Body so curious, with its variety of Members, every way fitted for all the Ends and Purposes of Life here, and did so richly furnish him with all Conveniencies in this World, both for his Necessity, Ease, and Accommodation while he was in the same?

Did not God make Man, as it were, Lord over this lower World, in forming the Creatures for his Service, and granting Man Power, Dominion, and Authority over the Works of his Hands, to use all these Creatures about him, as his Necessity and Conveniency did want the same?

We can have no Dispute with the Deists upon any of these Questions, seeing they talk so much of the Dignity of Human Nature, and of the Lord's Bounty and Liberality to him above the rest of the Creatures that are about him.

Now, upon this I would ask them, if it was not very suitable and reasonable, that Man, who did hold all these Things by the free Gift, Bounty and Favour of his Lord and Master, should not, at least on all proper Occasions, give and return to his Lord and Master a Tribute of Praise, an Acknowledgement, or call it what you will, whereby Man should publicly acknowledge his Dependence upon his Lord and Master, and own that from him he does daily possess so many Favours ?

And upon this I would further enquire, if it be contrary to *Reason*, or *Nature of Things*, as they love to speak, that when Man was placed in such advantageous Circumstances, in the Middle of the Garden of Pleasure and Delight, enjoying that profuse Plenty, if we may so call it, which God did lay to his Hands, that he should by some *publick Act* or Deed, acknowledge daily, that all he did enjoy, he held by the Tenor of a free Gift from God ?

Sure I am this looks very reasonable and I hope these Gentlemen, who pretend so much to be governed by Reason, will allow that nothing was more reasonable, than that Man should both daily and publicly acknowledge that all he enjoyed was from the Goodness and free Gift of his God.

Why then, I want to know what there was in God's *forbidding Adam to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*, and that upon the *Pain of Death*, [I abstract here altogether in my present Argument, from the Consideration of the Covenant of Works, and regard it only at the Time as a *positive Precept*, given by God

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to Man in these Circumstances] while the Lord his God allowed him Plenty and Variety, while he gave him Dominion over the Fowls of the Air, Fishes of the Sea, and Beasts of the Field, and of every Tree of the Garden to eat freely, was it a hard Command? Was it unworthy of God that he should require of *Adam* to abstain from the eating of one Tree, thereby to give an outward practical Evidence, or Token and Sign of his *Homage* and Acknowledgement before God every Day, that he was sensible he was not absolute Lord over his fellow Creatures, but did hold his *Right* to them under God his supreme Lord and Master?

Was it unworthy of God to require such a Thing of *Adam* in these Circumstances? And was it unworthy of *Adam* in his Circumstances to be under such a Command as this?

Yea, was it not very necessary, that *Adam*, in the Affluence and Abundance he did enjoy, and in the Exercise of that Dominion which he was to use over the Creatures, the Work of the Almighty Power, as well as himself, that *Adam* should daily have before his Eyes, some standing Monument, whereby he might still be put in Mind, and kept in Mind, that he was not Sovereign Lord of the Universe? but did hold all that he enjoyed, by a free Gift from his Lord and Master, and for which he was to acknowledge him daily; as in a thankful Impression thereof in his Spirit, so by his abstaining from the Fruit of that Tree, which was placed in the Midst of the Garden, that *Adam* might have it continually on his Eye, and thereby be put continually in Mind of his Duty towards, and his Dependence upon God.

Yea,

Yea, might we not here pose the most circumstance of these rational Gentlemen, whether they find themselves always in case to give not only outwardly, but inwardly in the Frame and Temper of their Heart, that Reverence and Respect that is due unto God, as their bountifull Lord and Master? Or whether or not they do want themselves daily to be put in Mind of the same? And yet after all, are not ready enough to lose suitable Impressions upon their Spirits, of their Dependence upon the Author of their Being.

Whether or not was it then worthy of God, to give such a Precept to *Adam*, to put in Mind and keep him in Mind habitually of his Duty?

Yea, whether or not was it necessary, that *Adam* should have such a Monitor continually before him, to keep him in Mind of his Duty; and that by giving Obedience to this Precept, in abstaining from eating of that Fruit alone, he should thereby testify, that he did hold all his Happiness, and was content to hold all his Happiness dependently upon God?

Was not this then very agreeable to the *Nature of Things*, that is to say, to that Sovereignty that God challengeth over his Creatures, and to that Dependence that Man had upon God his Lord and Master? Was it not agreeable to this, that in some such publick Manner as this, that Man should daily acknowledge his Dependence, and that he was well content with that Measure and Degree of Happiness, his allwise and beneficent Creator had thought fit to bestow upon him?

I think I have said enough to obtain Assent from every one that will allow himself to be guided by Reason, that it was every Way suitable to the Nature

Nature of Things; and I would know, what was in all this that may be called an *arbitrary Command*, that was unworthy for God to give or Man to receive.

And then if you will consider it in this View, which I hope will be acknowledged to be worthy of God, I would next know at these who make Light of it, if there could be possibly a greater *Aggravation of any Sin*, than this of *Adam's* eating of the forbidden Fruit, in Opposition to the Will and Command of his Lord and Master?

Was not this most criminal in its Nature? Was it not to say, and to say it not only in Words but in Deeds, that he would hold his Happiness no longer dependently upon God; and would thereupon withdraw, or refuse to pay that Tribute which he was commanded for to give?

Was not this to say, that he would acknowledge God no longer for his lawful and supreme Lord; that he would no longer be obliged to God for any of these Favours he stood possessed of, but was well pleased with the Project to which he was tempted, to set up to be *God himself*, and to be *Independent*, and as the necessary Consequent of that woful and hellish Resolution, to throw up all Acknowledgment of Homage and Subjection to his Lord and Master?

Upon this, was it not *God-like* or suitable to his Majesty, to withdraw his Favour from Man his rebellious Creature?

And when God did withdraw, was it possible but Man must be *miserable*, in departing and being separate from God, the Fountain of all Life and Happiness: In the *Nature of the Thing* he must needs be plunged into the Depth of Misery.

Thus,

Thus, were we to go thro' the several *positive Precepts* that are in Religion, and consider them in the View and Design of God in giving them, we should find that far from being such *arbitrary Commands*, as our Adversaries would give out; that they were worthy of God to give, and suited to the State and Circumstances of his Creatures to whom they were given.

Thus I have endeavoured to shew, what the World may reckon the *Foolishness of preaching*, both as to Matter, and Manner of it, is a Mean worthy of God, and suited to answer the great Design, the Glory of his own Perfections in the Salvation and Happiness of Mankind; and in particular, that as the Moral Precepts in the Sacred Writ, are pure and holy like God himself, so the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity are every Way worthy of the Wisdom of God, are agreeable to his Perfections; and that even these which we do call *positive Precepts* in Religion, are far from being unworthy of God to give, but every Way suiting his great Design, and suited to our Circumstances, and to that Dependence which all of us have upon our Lord and Master, and becoming that Reverence and Regard which we owe to his Authority.

III. We come now to the *Third* and last Proposition, namely, That it was every Way *worthy of God*, and wherein his Wisdom is display'd, *That when the World by their Wisdom knew not God, then it pleased God by the Foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

We have already, on the first Proposition, sufficiently to our Purpose evinced, *that the World notwithstanding all their Pretences to Wisdom, knew not God*; and therefore have only one Branch of this

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third Proposition to illustrate, that when they, in all their Endeavours, failed of attaining the End, that then it was worthy of God, and suitable to his acting in Divine Wisdom, to reveal and make known to the World, the Method, Means, and Way in which they might attain to Happiness.

When all their Endeavours and Projects this Way, did entirely fall short of the Design proposed, it is so far from being a just Exception against Christianity, *that it was no sooner revealed or made known to the World*; that the Wisdom of its Author is manifested, that at that *particular Time* and Period this Light was made to shine forth.

That immediately after the *Fall*, this Method of Salvation thro' an atoning Sacrifice, was revealed and made known to the World.

That the same Revelation was again renewed immediately after the Flood, to *Noah* and his *Family*, from whom all the Families of the Earth are descended, and that they were persuaded and satisfied that this Revelation was from Heaven. Both these Propositions we shall take for granted, until such Time as our Adversaries shall account, how all Nations in the most early Times, did readily fall in with Sacrifices and shedding of Blood, as a necessary and essential Part of their Religion and Worship.

That they did so, is what is evident from all History, beyond Contradiction; and therefore it is incumbent on these Gentlemen, to shew, how any Nation or People should fall into that Practice, from any Thing they could learn from *Reason* or the *Nature of Things*.

And while *Reason* and the *Nature of Things* is, according to themselves, always the same and un-
variable;

variable, we say it is impossible to be accounted for, seeing it is the most ridiculous and absurd Thing to Reason for to imagine, that ever God, an *infinitely pure Spirit*, could delight in the Smoke of Sacrifices, or that an *infinitely holy God* should be induced to pardon a guilty Criminal, because he takes away the Life of an *innocent Creature*.

These Things are so shocking to Reason, that 'tis impossible any Person or Society of Persons could ever have stumbled into such a Practice, from any Thing that the Light of Nature could ever have dictate unto them.

It is impossible therefore to account for this Practice, but upon the Supposition of this Truth, that it was *early and sufficiently* revealed to Mankind, that God's Design of pardoning Sinners, and bringing them to Happiness, was thro' the Intervention of an attoning Sacrifice (k) and Propitiation.

This is so well laid down in the *Essay* referred to, that until those who impugn Revelation, shall be pleased to give an Answer to what is said there on this Head, that any Discourse further upon this Subject would be impertinent.

That this Revelation of the *great Sacrifice* to come was kept up among the *Jews*, the whole of their ancient Records do abundantly manifest; so that it is impossible to frame an Argument on this Head, why this Method of Salvation was not sooner revealed among them, seeing 'tis undeniable and plain, that this Revelation was all along hand-

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(k) See some Thoughts concerning Religion, &c.

ed down among them by the Prophets, whom God raised up among them; besides that in their Tabernacle and Temple Worship and Service, they had a Revelation of it every Day.

And seeing all their *Faith* and *Hope of Salvation*, must needs terminate and center in the *Person* of this great and atoning *Sacrifice*, or in the *Person* of their *Messias*, under which Name he was known among them, it was every Way necessary that such *Prophecies* of him should go before, that such *Characters* of his *Person* should be pointed out, such *Circumstances* of the *Time*, *Place* and *Manner* of his *Birth* be assign'd, such *Accounts* of his *Person*, *Life*, *distinguishing Actions*, of his *Death* and *Resurrection*, laid down, and evidently set forth in these Writings believed among them to be *Divine*, that there might be no Mistake of his *Person* when he should come among them.

When this *Person* was to come into the World, and take away *Sin by the Sacrifice of himself*, it was plain and manifest in the *Nature of the Thing*, as well as *prophecied* of him, that he must come and make his Appearance in a mean, low State and Condition, otherways he had not been despised by his Countreymen, persecuted and put to Death by them, which yet was necessary to answer the End of his coming, and being made a *Sacrifice* for *Sin*. Had he come in State and Grandeur, answering the corrupt Notions of that Age concerning their *Messias*, they would have taken him by Force and made him a King, and so he could not have been pursued to Death, despised or slighted of them, which yet was necessary to answer the Design of his coming.

Being then that these Circumstances would be the Occasion that many *Impostors* would be ready to assume to themselves that *sacred Character*, while the *Jews* were so fond to hear that their *Messias* was to appear: As in Fact it is true, that many such *Cheats* and *Impostors* did appear at that Time, it was therefore necessary, and most necessary, that Christ should not make his *Appearance* in the World, untill his *Character*, untill the Circumstances of the *Time, Place, and Manner* of his *Birth*, untill his peculiar *personal Actions*, his *Death*, as well as his *Resurrection*, should be abundantly settled and confirmed by undoubted Prophecies concerning him that should go before so as that People, the *Jews*, among whom he was to make his *Appearance*, might be sure to distinguish and know him the *true Messias*, the *Sent of God*, who was to come in *God's great Name* to *save them*, from all others that might or should pretend to come in that great *Character*.

So that the *Jews* had no Reason to form such an *Objection* why Christ the *Saviour* was so long in being manifested to the World.

Nor in Fact did they ever make such an *Objection* against *Jesus of Nazareth* his being the *Messias*, however on other Accounts, as not suiting their carnal Notions, they did reject him, yet it was never on this Head, that he did not appear sooner; yea they continue in the Belief that he is yet to come, notwithstanding it be so long since his *Appearance*.

As to the *Gentile World*, who were destitute of *Revelation*, and the Knowledge of this *Messias*, this *Saviour* of the World, and the Method of
 Accep-

Acceptance with God thro' him ; 'tis plain from what is already said, that they had the Knowledge of this Revelation in Noah's Family, from whom they were all descended : So it is evident in Fact, that this continued as a *traditional Religion* among them a long Time after their *Dispersion*, even tho' they were not of that Family of *Abraham*, to whom the Lord was pleased to give new Discoveries of that Method from Time to Time.

This is undeniable in the Case of *Jethro* Priest of *Median*, *Moses's* Father-in-Law, and *Job*, at whatever Time of the World they shall be pleased to fix his Life ; he speaks most pointedly of the God and Redeemer, so his Friends talk of *Visions*, Discoveries, and Revelations from God of his gracious Purpose of Mercy and Pardon to poor Sinners, particularly *Elihu*, *Job xxxiv. 19, 20, &c.*

But seeing it is plain, that the Heathen World soon lost the Knowledge of these Things, and however they kept up the Custom of sacrificing, yet as they mingled with it abominable Rites of their own, and wholly lost the End and Intent of Sacrifices, as instituted by God : It will be said, why did not God send among them such Men and Prophets as might keep and preserve the Knowledge of the *original Revelation*, and of the only Method of attaining Happiness and the Favour of God ?

And seeing it is undeniable, that the rest of the Nations did very soon lose the Knowledge of this Method, and wandered in their own Ways, after their own *Inventions*, why did not God, say our Adversaries, sooner take Pity upon them, and make known among them the only Way
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of Salvation, and not delay the same, untill the latter Ages of the World?

If we should, in Answer to this, resolve the Matter into the Sovereignty of God, I know not who is able with Reason to object against it; for who hath been the *Lord's Counsellor*, or who is he that will pretend to be *wiser than the Almighty*, or assign a Reason why God in Wisdom should have done it sooner than he hath thought fit. His Ways are *unsearchable*, and who is able to find out the *Almighty to Perfection*; or who is *that vain Man* that will presume to direct the Lord in his Counsels, or prescribe a Rule to him what he must do, and at what Time he must do it?

Surely when we had plunged ourselves into Misery by departing from the Lord, and trampling upon his Laws and Authority: It was of his *good Will and Pleasure* alone, that he would have Mercy upon any, and that his *Holiness and Justice* was not made eternally to shine in the Flames of their Punishment.

Seeing therefore, his shewing Mercy to any of *Adam's sinful Posterity*, and providing for them a *Saviour and Redeemer*, was an Act of his *rich, free, and sovereign Grace*: Who is he that will lay down Measures to the Almighty, whom he will pity, and at what Time and Manner he must do it?

His Providence is a great Depth, and his Goings and Footsteps are in the deep Waters; the several Occurrences, both in the Kingdom of Nature and Grace, are what we, with our short Line of Reason, are not able to fathom, and innumerable Events in the Revolutions of States, Kingdoms, and Circum-

Circumstances of particular Persons were daily occurring, which the learned and penetrating Philosophers, with all their Reason and Wisdom, were not able to account for; and indeed it was no Wonder, for it is but a *passing, transient, and partial* View of any Event that we can have on the Stage of Time; we cannot view the same in all its *Causes, Circumstances, Concomitants*, in what it may be mainly designed for, nor yet can pierce into Futurity, and lay open its *Effects and Consequences*; and therefore 'tis no Wonder that we are not able to account for all the Mysteries in Divine Providence; but these will shine in their Beauty, Lustre, and Connection, when the *whole Scene* thereof will be displayed at one View in the Light of Glory.

Thus, were we to resolve an Answer to this Question into the *Sovereignty of God*, I see not what Man can object to the same; and it ought to silence us, that *he who is infinitely wise and knows best how to rule in the World, and dispense of his Grace and Favours*, hath thought fit *only at a such a Period, to send his Son into the World*, who was to be a *Light to the Gentiles, as well as the Glory of his People Israel*. This ought to satisfy us, that it was the fittest Time, seeing God himself thought so.

And for poor Mortals to pretend to reason and argue against the same, is no less Arrogance than to pretend to be wiser than God, and direct him better in his Councils.

But tho' the Lord be not obliged to account for his Managements to us, or give us a Reason for his Will and Pleasure, *for who can stay his Hand, or say unto him, what dost thou?* Yet we find, in
Answer.

Answer to the Objection we have been considering, the Apostle, in the Words of our Text, does suggest another Solution, by pointing out to us, that this is not only an Act of his *Sovereignty*, but likewise of his *Wisdom*, that at that particular Period, and no sooner, God should make known, more fully and *extensively*, this Method of Salvation to the World, *when, or after that the World by all their Wisdom knew not God.*

What Job affirms, *That vain Man would be wise, tho' born like an wild Ass's Colt*, is verified in lamentable Experience, that poor Man, is no less proud than he is miserable; and this our *Pride of Spirit* in pretending to Wisdom, while we are, and *act as Fools* in respect of every valuable and lasting Concern, is no small Part of our *Misery*, of the Corruption, and Depravity of our Nature, that must be cured before we can be happy.

And our gracious God purposing for us Salvation suited to our *Distempers*, it is manifest it must be in such a Method as to counter this *Pride of our Spirits*, and *humble us* in the Sight of God: In this the Apostle is most plain in the subsequent Part of this Chapter, and concludes, *That no Flesh should glory in his Presence, but he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

Consequently in every Part of this Salvation, it was suitable to God's Design, that it should be in such a *Manner*, and by such *Means*, as Man should never have been able to contrive, or project, that the *Pride of Man* may be humbled, and the whole Praise redound unto God, to whom alone it is due.

Hence effectually to stop the Mouth of Man's glorying in *himself*, and his *Wisdom*, it was agreeable

able to the *Assings* of *Divine Wisdom*, that Man should be left a while, by his Wisdom, and searching into Nature, to see what Remedy he could find out, to cure his Malady, and attain to Happiness.

When the *great* and *wise Men* had tried this to the utmost, and by a *Succession* of them, each having the Advantage of the Invention of those who went before him, and each endeavouring to reform, and make up what was amiss, or wanting in the Schemes of others : And after that all their Labours this Way were fruitless, and never reached any valuable End, or Recovery of Mankind ; yea, when they acknowledged so much themselves, when they fainted, and gave over the Search, as being noways able to attain the End, then it was worthy of God, then did his Wisdom shine : This was what suited God's great End and Design, in *staining the Glory of all Pride*, mercitully to step in, and *by the Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe*.

Had not the Lord in his *Wisdom* and *Sovereignty*, left the *World*, the *wise Men* and *Philosophers*, to exert themselves, and stretch *their Wisdom* to the utmost to *reform* the *World*, the *Pride* of Man would have been apt to glory, that had they been left to themselves, they could have discovered these Things, or at least somewhat that would have reached the same End.

That their *Pride* would have tempted them arrogantly to assume so much to themselves, is evident from the *Disputers of this Age*, who, notwithstanding those that went before them, had been convinced all their Endeavours had been unsuccessful, and lamented so much in very affec-

ing Strains: Yet our *Moderns* have lick'd up *Principles* from Revelation, and with their usual Modesty paum them on the World, as *Dictates of Nature* discovered by them, and by these endeavour to overturn the Necessity of Revelation itself.

That in Fact, the Lord in his Providence, rais'd up some very great and wise Men, called *Philosophers*, one after another, who spent their Time, and imployed their Talents in laying down Rules, and prescribing Methods, by which the World might be recovered, is what will not, in this Age, be denied.

The *Variety*, yea *Diversity* of Opinions among these *Philosophers*, about *true Happiness*, wherein it did consist, and the Way how to attain it, is a plain Demonstration, that the *succeeding* were very sensible those who went before them, had not hit upon it, but were far from reaching the End.

That the World was neither the wiser nor the better, with Respect to true and lasting Happiness, and the Cure of the Corruption and Depravity of human Nature, is evident in Fact from the History of these Times, and the Acknowledgements of *Philosophers* themselves.

That after their utmost Searches, they did at length (*l*) despair of ever being able, by all their *Wis-*

(*l*) There is to this Purpose, a remarkable Passage, cited by Doctor Clark, in his *Evidences of revealed Religion*, Page 157, 158. and by Fleming in his *Christology*, Vol. 2. Page 42. The Words are from *Plato* in his *Alcibiades*, where he brings in one of *Socrates's* Scholars saying to him, It seems to me best to expect quietly, and to wait till

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Wisdom, to reach the End, unless the Lord himself should interpose from Heaven, by sending a *divine Person*, a *divine Philosopher*, as they speak, among them for that End.

That from the Idea they had of the *Divine Goodness*, *Mercy* and *Compassion*, they did expect, that God would reveal from Heaven the true Way of attaining his Favour, and deliver them from their Misery and Darkness, is no less evident from many Expressions that dropt from them, and from an acknowledged general Expectation prevailing, that some such great Person (*m*) would appear up-

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till such Time as we can know certainly how we ought to behave ourselves both towards God and Man—It will be best to forbear offering any more Sacrifices—than to run the Hazard of offering Sacrifices, which we know not whether they are acceptable to God, or not, &c.

(*m*) Among many Quotations brought to this Purpose, I only point out these known Passages. *Suetonius in Vespas. Chap. 4.* There was a constant and prevailing Opinion spread thro' all the East; that it was in the *Fates* or *Decrees*, that the *Jews* should be Masters of the World; &c. See to the same Purpose, *Tacit. Hist. Book 5. Chapter 13.*

In the fore-mentioned Place out of *Plato's Alcibiades*.—When will that Person come? I long to see and know who he is; when shall he appear? &c.—Well then, replies the Scholar, We will then make our Offerings to the Gods when the Day comes; and I hope, GOD willing, it may not be far off.

That they did expect him under the Character of a Divine Person, who was to free the World of Misery and Sin, is plain from that Part of the *Sybillian Oracles*, recited by *Virgil, Eccl. 4.* It is very true, like a Courtier and Flatterer, he applies that Prophecy to a Son of *Asinius Pollio* the Consul; but as the History informs us, that

on the Stage, who was to rule and govern in the World, and make the World happy under his Government: So that Christ was justly spoken of by the Prophet under this Title, *The Desire of all Nations.*

Upon all which it is evident, that *the World by all their Wisdom knew not God*, could not inform the World what Way he was to be worshipped acceptably, could not prescribe the Method for the healing and curing of our corrupt Nature.

And therefore I hope, that whosoever will allow himself seriously to consider these Arguments, will with me conclude, that it is so far from being an Argument, that Christianity is not from Heaven, because Christ appeared no sooner in the World; that it was every Way suitable to Divine Wisdom, and God's great Design, *that then, and not till then*, when the World by all their Wisdom knew not God, *that it pleased God, by the Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe.*

Now, from what is above laid down, we deduce the following Conclusions.

1. What Folly is it, and Contradiction to right and sober Reason, to reject and cavil at any Part of Divine Revelation, because it contains somewhat which we are not able to comprehend. It must be Arrogancy in us, poor short-sighted Creatures, who cannot account for the Structure of our own Bodies,

that Child died very soon, to check his Flattery: For 'tis evident, that that Prophecy, as quoted by him, (and we know not if there be any other of them extant, not suspected of Forgery) can agree to none, but truly to a Divine Person, and the Blessings spoken off are too great for *Man* to procure to the World.

Bodies, for the Union of Soul and Body, and how a Body and Spirit do mutually act upon one another ; yea, who cannot account for the smallest Part of the Creation, or give a Reason why a Pile of Grass is green, and not of another Colour ; and yet will presume to prescribe Rules to the Almighty, what is fit for him to do, or when it is fittest for him to do it ; as if we were able to govern the World better than he, or being his Counsellours, would dictate Wisdom to him.

2. How vain and arrogant is it for poor Man who knows nothing, and is but one Degree removed from nothing, to pretend *so* to comprehend the *Divine Nature*, and our Dependance upon God, as from these, which they do call *the Nature of Things* ; to tell us that it is not fit for God to prescribe us any Thing as Duty, but what Man is able to find out of himself, and be able to give a Reason why it is commanded ? And yet upon this false and absurd Proposition hangs all the Stress of their late Attacks upon Revelation, and the positive Precepts laid down there.

3. That what the Adversaries to Divine Revelation do glory most in, and object against Religion when it is allowed a fair and impartial Trial, it appears so far from being inconsistent with the Wisdom of God, that it plainly appears to be worthy of him, and carries its own Evidence and Character of Wisdom in it.

4. That therefore *Christianity* is not a Religion that is afraid of the Light, but craves a fair and impartial Examination : And however it reveals many Things, which Nature's Light and Reason could never have discovered ; and however indeed some of these be above our Reason

or Faculties to comprehend, or explain fully, yet there is nothing in it that implies a Contradiction: Nor is it to be supposed we shall be able fully to understand the whole Counsel of God, until *we see him as he is*; yea without doubt through Eternity there will be new Wonders of infinite Wisdom discovered, to the Faculties of the *Admirers* and *Inquirers* in the higher House, which will make their Songs of Praise to be always *new* thro' endless Ages: Wherefore, unless we will pretend to be as wise as God, we should cease from imagining, that we are able to give a sufficient Reason for all his Actions:

5. While all these great and wise Men, by all their Wisdom knew not God; and what Knowledge they had was not sufficient to make known to them Redemption from their present miserable State: Yea, for all the Knowledge they had of God, yet *did not worship him as God, but became vain in their Imaginations, &c.* as the Apostle does justly charge them, *Rom. ii. 21, 22, &c. And changed the Glory of the incorruptible God into an Image made like to corruptible Men, &c.* Having before us such awful Examples, let us who enjoy the Benefit of Divine Revelation, bless God who hath *brought Life and Immortality to Light by the Gospel*, who hath thereby not only made known to us Salvation purchased in a Way worthy of his Wisdom, and illustrative of all his Divine Perfections, a Salvation every Way suited to the Case and Circumstances of us poor Sinners, who were in no Capacity to help ourselves.

Let us bless and magnify his Grace, not only for this Revelation, and fall in with God's great Design in it; but let us likewise bless him, that now

is revealed to us our *Duty* in a more distinct Manner ; and that we have set before us *Motives* and *Arguments* to our *Duty* of vastly more Influence than all these, by which these *wise Men* did, or could urge the Practice of *moral Virtue* or good Actions upon their Disciples and Followers.

Let us therefore be thankful for the Revelation we are privileged with : Let us study to know our Mercy, and improve it ; above all Things seeking to feel the Power and Efficacy of these Truths upon our Spirits. It is then that we shall have the *Witness* for Christianity *within ourselves*, when we shall feel that our Religion hath wrought in us that for which it is revealed to the World, even the Healing of our Natures, and raising us up to that Measure and Degree of Holiness, and Conformity to God ; That we may be capable of serving him in the Spirit, capable of beholding and seeing his glorious Perfections shining in the Revelation he has given of himself, and ascribing to him the Glory that is due : Capable of *delighting ourselves in God*, and resting in him as our alone Portion and Happiness ; That we find ourselves, *Rom. xii. 2. transformed by the renewing of our Minds, and so may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect Will of God.*

It is then we shall be able to relish the Comforts of Religion, when we thus know its Reality in our own Experience, and set to our Seal to it, That these are the *Truths of God*, which accompanied with a Divine Influence, have wrought in us, that, which nothing less than *omnipotent Power* could effect.

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This is that practical *Witness*, for the Reality of Religion and Christianity, *which he that believeth doth feel within himself*, 1 John v. 10.

6. Let me conclude with another *Inference*. Is it so that these great Men, these Philosophers, by all their *Precepts*, Discourses and Harrangues, upon the Subject of *Morality*, were never able to reform the World: Hence we infer, That the best, most learned, or eloquent Discourses of *Morality*, will never prove the Mean of saving Sinners, or reaching the great End of the Gospel, namely the *Conversion* of these who are Strangers to the Life and Power of Religion.

We profess, and our Adversaries here will not deny it, That Christianity does reveal the most sublime, the most perfect, and best digested System of *Morality* that ever the World was blest with.

We likewise profess, That our Saviour and his Apostles in their Discourses have enforced these Duties of *Morality* by more powerful, more moving and affecting Arguments, than ever the Heathen Philosophers were able to press their Precepts by.

We acknowledge, That Christ hath incorporate the Law or Duties of *natural Religion*, if we may be allowed so to express it, into his Religion which he hath taught the World: And requires Obedience to these his Commands from all his Disciples, and enjoins his Followers, that they *be careful to maintain good Works, and bring forth, this way, much Fruit, that they may glorify their Father which is in Heaven*.

He told his Hearers, *That he came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it*; and his Apostles in preaching the Justification of the Sinner before God, thro' the Righteousness of Christ, without
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the Works of the Law, yet declare that thereby *they do not make void the Law, but establish it.*

Yet sure it is, that the preaching of the Law is not of itself the Mean of God's Appointment for converting of Sinners, of delivering them from these *wicked Courses* into which they are naturally plunged: It is not the Means of healing their corrupt and depraved Nature, or putting them in Case truly to yield Obedience to the Law, or these Precepts of Morality, which by Revelation are inculcate upon them with the greatest Evidence and strongest Motives.

It is certain, that since the Coming of Christ, and the Law as explained by him and his Apostles, the Minister of the Gospel, or if you will, the *Christian Philosopher* can now talk and discourse of the Law, and Duties of Morality more distinctly, and inculcate its Duties by stronger and sweeter Motives, than the *Heathen Philosophers* ever did, or could do by all their Learning and Eloquence; yet it is equally true, that while they preach no more but Morality, they shall see as little Effect of their Sermons, as ever the Philosophers did of their Discourses.

That these *wise Men*, by all their Precepts of Morality, were never able to reform human Nature, hath been abundantly shewed; their Neighbours were little improved or bettered by all their fine Sayings, yea, nor even themselves. If it be true what *Diogenes Laertius* saith of them in the History that he gives of their Lives, That they themselves lived in the Neglect of these Precepts which they taught others, and in the Practice of these Sins, and even very gross Sins, which they did de-claim against in others.

Our late Authors, who write on this Subject; do observe a great many Defects about them in their teaching Morality, and assign a good many Reasons, why all their Teaching could not produce the desired Effect.

1mo, That however by their Contemplation of the Works of *Creation* and *Providence*, they did read the Being of God, and his *eternal Power* and *God-head*, as the Apostle expresseth it, *Rom. i. 19, 20.* yet they had, at best, but gross Notions of the *Divine Nature* and his *Perfections*, and as the Consequent of this, they were ignorant of that Way of worshipping the *true and living God*, which was suited to his *Excellencies* and *Perfections*: For while *they knew God, they did not worship him as God*, saith the Apostle: They fell into the worshipping God by *Images*: And as they could not well conceive how all *these Perfections*, which did produce so many various and surprising Effects in the World did belong to any one *Being*: Hence they fancied a *Plurality of Gods*, to whom they did ascribe these different Effects.

Yea the greatest of these Men, who maintained the *Unity* of the *Divine Nature*, yet still they fell in with the corrupt (n) Worship of their own Country, and directed others to follow the same.

2do, As they could not account for the Way how our Nature became so corrupted and depraved:

(n) *Cicero de Legibus*, Allows us to worship and serve these Gods, which we have received from our Ancestors. And *Epictetus*, Chap. 38. Allows his Disciples to offer up their Sacrifices to the Gods, every one according to the Religion and Custom of his own Country.

praved : So they were more especially ignorant of the Way by which such as had offended God might be restored to his Favour, and how our sinful Nature might be healed : Hence the Multitude of their Sacrifices, and sundry very shocking and unaccountable Parts of their Worship to appease their Deities ; and even the greatest of them declared, that they thought somewhat else was wanting, that they knew not, or could not find out ; as we shewed from *Socrates*, in *Plato* his *Alcibiades*.

3tio, As they seem all to deny and ridicule the *Resurrection of the Body*, Acts xvii. 18, 32. And as some of them denied the *Immortality of the Soul*, and *future State of Rewards and Punishments* ; even so these among them, who appeared to maintain and assert the same, yet talked about it sometimes in such an uncertain and doubtful Manner, as could not fail to render their Disciples *Scepticks* about it : Or at least they maintained it with so little Certainty, as it could have little Influence upon their Walk and Conversation. The great *Socrates* in his *Apology*, a little before his Death, expressed himself thus, as *Plato* reports ; *I am*, says he to his Disciples, *about to leave this World*, and you are to continue still in it, which of us shall have the better Part allotted us, God only knows. And while he expresses his Hopes of his being happy after Death, yet says, that he would not be too confident and peremptory about it.

And no less a Philosopher than the great *Cicero*, long after *Socrates*, speaks very dubiously on this Head. *Tusculan Quest . Lib. 1.* speaking of the Diversity of Opinions among the Philosophers about the Mortality or Immortality of the Soul,

hath these very remarkable Words (o), *Which of these Opinions is true, God only knoweth, and which of them most probable, is a very great Question.*

From whence, I am sure, it appears evident, that the greatest of these Men spoke so doubtfully about all these Motives and Arguments, with which they did inculcate their Precepts of Morality, that they must needs have but very small Influence upon the Practice of their Disciples and Followers.

4to, I need not in the next Place remark to you, That even as to *moral Virtue*, and our Obligations to it, they did talk very inconsistently; and there does not appear any one consistent Scheme of Morality that was laid down by them all; *Who spoke rather as a Trial of their Wit and Eloquence, than any Endeavour to reform the Manners of Mankind, by shewing them plain and necessary Duty, as Cicero himself does acknowledge in his Book de Republica.*

And that any of our *modern Philosophers* do talk more rationally and consistently on this Head, is plainly owing to the Advantage they have from Revelation, tho' many have not the Ingenuity to own so much.

5to, It is remarked concerning them, That when their Philosophy was at its greatest Height, that the greatest of them were so divided among themselves about *Man's chief Good or Happiness*, and they did run into so many different and contrary Opinions about it, that *Augustine*, from *Varo*, reckons no less than 280 different Sentiments of Philosophers upon the Head; and they were so obstinate every one in defending his own Opinion, that they left the World at an Uncertainty in the Matter, and lost themselves in Wranglings and endless Disputations.

6to, As to these Things wherein these Philosophers were agreed, and which they were able to explain and prove distinctly to others; such as the plain and obvious Duties of Morality, yet it is acknowledged by others, and complained of by themselves, that they had not sufficient Authority to enforce them upon others, and oblige

(o) *Harum sententiarum quæ vera sit, Deus aliquis viderit: Quæ verisimilia magna questio est.*

oblige Mankind to fall in with them ; and so they themselves despaired of the World's being reformed thereby, and rather proposed these Rules and Dictates of theirs as Matter of Speculation, and to advance their own Reputation, than that they expected that Mankind was to be reformed by them.

These, and others of the same Nature, are assigned as the Grounds and Reasons, why it was not possible the World could be reformed by all that these *wise Men* or *Philosophers* could advance on the Head of Morality, and to one or all of them it was owing that the World was neither the *wiser* nor the *better*, with respect to the great Ends of Salvation by all that they had done.

Yet I know not, but after all, there are greater Reasons, why all their *fine Sayings* had so little Effect ; nor am I quite satisfied, that this last mentioned, namely their *Want of Authority* to enforce their Precepts, be a true Reason, however they themselves thought so, and complained of their Want of it.

Their Complaints on this Head do argue, how little they did truly understand the Corruption and Depravity of human Nature, and what poor Notions they seem to have had of a real Cure or Remedy for the same.

Why ? They were Men of great Learning, and some of them of great Influence in the World, and had much to say in the States and Common-wealths where they did live ; and yet they complained they did want Authority to enforce their Precepts ; that is to say, they would by *external Force* have compelled Men to an outward Compliance with, and Observation of their Rules.

But alas ! What would this have availed to the Cure of our corrupt and depraved Nature, while the Heart was not *renewed or sanctified*.

This was with the Pharisee to make clean the Outside of the Cup or Platter, while the Inside was full of Uncleaness and Abominations.

By this they discovered what mean Notions they had of the *Holiness of God*, and what poor Notions they had of that *Holiness* in the Creature, that would make us capable of Happiness ; it discovers what little Knowledge they had of *real Happiness*, and wherein the true Happiness and Dignity of our Nature does consist, namely, in Likeness and Conformity to God, not only in our outward Actions, but more especially in the Frame,
Temper

Temper, and Disposition of the Soul, whereby, says the Apostle, 2 Pet. i. 3. *We are Partakers of the Divine Nature.*

But why did they want Authority to enforce their Precepts? Had they not as much of Human Learning and Eloquence as the *Apostles of Christ*? Had they not vastly more Regard paid them by the great Ones of the Earth, than the few despised and persecuted Disciples of Jesus?

Was not the Number and Quality of their Disciples and Followers, in all Human Probability, able to have more Influence on the World, than the few despised Christians, who went about preaching that Doctrine, that not only was reckoned *Foolishness* by the World, preaching that Doctrine that was so very contrary to the most beloved Lusts, and strongest Inclinations of the Children of Men, and yet by the preaching of the Apostles, the Power, Wisdom and Learning of the World was made to fall before them, and Men of the most abandoned Principles and Practice were brought to the Acknowledgement of the Truth of Christianity, embraced its Doctrines, and its Morality, so as with Chearfulness to go to Death in Defence of the same.

Why, therefore its plain, there was something *higher* and *greater* wanting than all these Grounds and Reasons, that are for ordinary assigned, why all the Dictates of these Philosophers upon the Subject of *Morality*, was not able to reform the Manners of Mankind.

And that which we reckon was the greatest Thing wanting, however little observed, was this, namely, That however clearly and eloquently they did talk upon this Subject of *Morality*, in however beautiful Colours they did paint the same, whatever beautiful Ideas they did give us of *Virtue*, and whatever frightful Ideas they did give us of *Vice*, as below the Human Nature, as an Enemy to Society, as what must need be attended with Shame, Disgrace, and Misery, as its frightful Consequences; yet still all these *fine Sayings* of theirs were *separate from Christ*, or had no Connection with him, who is the Life and Soul of all Religion; and as they were not *Means of God's Appointment* to reform the World, so they were not accompanied with the *Power of the Spirit of Christ*, without which, no Teaching shall ever reach any saving End, without which no Person ever

was

was, or shall be converted, without which there is no Instruction, that ever will have a real and transforming Efficacy upon the Hearers of the same.

And therefore for the same Reason, however much now some are delighted with Harrangues of *Morality*, or Discourses upon *Moral Virtue*, and however that be a Subject upon which many seem fond to shew their Eloquence, yet it is certain that these are not the Discourses or Sermons that will reach the *Great End* of Preaching, namely, *the Conversion of Sinners*, or *building up of the Saints in their most holy Faith*; nor are such Discourses found in Experience to have a suitable Tendency to reform the corrupt and degenerate Age wherein we live.

No doubt *Morality* is to be preached, and the Duties of both *Tables of the Law* to be pressed and inculcate: Holiness is one main Theme in the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus, as that *without which no Man shall see the Lord*.

But alas! the most Part of our Sermons, and Discourses on *Morality*, do labour under the same *grand Defect* with the Lectures of those *Philosophers*; only moral Duties are inculcate as agreeable to the Dictates of Nature, as flowing from the Reason and Nature of Things, as lovely and amiable in themselves, as carrying a Reward in their own Bosom, as what tend to the Peace and Happiness of Society where we live, with other *To-picks* of that Nature.

But when these shall be insisted upon never so much, while they are preached without any *Relation to Christ*, in whom all the Truths of Religion do, and must center, as they are not the Mean of God's Appointment for reforming the human Nature, now ruined by Sin; so they are never accompanied with the powerful working of that Spirit of Christ, which accompanied the preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles, by which Multitudes were converted, and which Spirit must still in its Measure accompany the preaching of the Gospel, and all the several Truths of Religion, otherwise they will never avail, nor answer the great End of Religion itself.

And this Mean of the Lord's Appointment, and which is followed with Divine Power to reach the End, *the Conversion of Sinners*, is, as the Apostle does very plainly and expressly affirm here, *the preaching Salvation thro' a crucified Jesus*.

This

This was the great Subject that he did insist upon, and testify on all Occasions; and however it was reckoned *Foolishness* by many, yet he was not discouraged; for it was the *Power of God to Salvation*: It was a *Weapon of Divine Appointment*, which was not indeed carnal, but *spiritual*, and mighty through God, to the pulling down of *strong Holds*, and casting down every *Imagination and high Thought* exalted against Jesus, 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

The Jews, saith the Apostle, *seek after a Sign*; why truly this Apostle was honoured of God to work Miracles, above many others, and he could have gratified them in their Desire.

The Greeks, on the other Hand, they *sought after Wisdom*; they did want such Discourses as were imbellished with all the *Topicks of Argument*, and *Flowers of Rhetorick and Eloquence*; why, 'tis very plain the Apostle could have gratified them in this likewise, as is evident from these Apologies he makes before *Felix and Agrippa*, as they are recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles*, where the best of Judges do acknowledge, there are *Stroaks of inimitable Eloquence*.

Yet we see the Apostle would not gratify either of them, tho' thereby he might have been more regarded, and gained their Esteem and Applause: But that which lay at Heart with him, was not his own Esteem, but their *Conversion to Christ*, and this, however tickling to the Ear, yet was not the *Mean of God's Appointment* for that End, and so it was not the *Weapon* he did, or could expect to prevail withal: And therefore, says he, *however the Jews require a Sign, and the Greeks seek after Wisdom, yet we preach Christ crucified, &c.*

And unless those who speak in the Name of Christ do low this Patern, in making this the great Subject of their Preaching; and unless in their Discourses upon Morality, they preach the same in its Connection with Christ, and our Duties as flowing from a vital Union with Christ, and a Principle of Grace in the Heart; unless accompanied by the *Spirit of Christ*; all will be to little Purpose for reaching the great End of the Gospel, the *Salvation of Sinners*.

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F I N I S.